

A Moveable Feast—IM Race-day Nutrition

One of the most important aspects of planning for an ironman distance event is race-day nutrition. Your race-day diet must include water, carbohydrates and electrolytes; and some athletes have found success adding small amounts of protein and fat. Improper fueling can lead to a very long day or worse -- a very short one.

Mapping out your nutritional strategy begins long before the big day. Race nutrition is very specific to the individual: what works for one does not necessarily work for another. Only you can determine what works best for you, and it may take some trial and error to find the correct mix of liquid and solid fuel to get you to the finish. How many calories you need to consume is dependent upon your body size, race pace, metabolism and how much glycogen is stored in your muscles. Again, IT IS VERY INDIVIDUAL.

Where to start? As a general guideline you need to consume between 300 and 500 calories per hour on the bike. Clydesdales may need up to 600-800 (minimum guideline for all is approximately 30 to 60 grams of carbohydrates per hour). It is key to get these calories in on the bike. (Make sure that your intake includes at least 4-8 ounces of fluid every 15 to 20 minutes.) If you do not get your established amount of calories in on the bike, it will be too late by the time you hit the run. Tell yourself, "Fueling on the bike sets me up for the run."

It is important to note that after the swim your working muscles have gone a period of time -- 60 to 120 minutes -- without any fuel, and you need to "make-up" this calorie-deficit, or you will surely pay the price later. You might, however, want to wait till a few miles into the bike (to settle down a bit) before you start your moveable feast. I suggest a few sips of water first and then your fuel. Another reason to pay careful attention to your intake evenly throughout your time on the bike is that it becomes more difficult for the body to absorb nutrients and water as the race progresses. Also the appeal of eating and drinking diminishes as you get closer to the finish---the gel at mile 20 does not go down quite as well as it did at mile 2.

If you properly fueled on the bike, you should be going into the run in fairly good shape. Now, remembering that it becomes harder to consume calories as you get further into the run, it is a good idea to try to consume some calories (about half of what you took in per hour on the bike) in transition or by the first aid station. From that point it is recommended to take fuel (water and race drink) at every aid station and a gel (if you can stomach it) every 30 to 40 minutes. As in the fueling on the bike, the fuel you take in on the run is very specific to your needs and tastes. I like to alternate cola and race drink along with water every aid station, and I also munch on a few pretzels during the run—the thought of gagging down another gel just does not work for me. Others may take a gel every aid station or just stick with water and race drink. Experimenting during your training will help you make those decisions.

How do you figure out what to consume? The best way to determine what is going to work best for you is to test it out during your long runs, rides and bricks. The next step would be to "race" test it in a half- ironman distance event. Make sure that you find out what type of fuel will be provided at aid stations in your upcoming race and test that out in your training and racing leading into the event.

To demonstrate how individual ironman nutritional needs are, I have included a variety of athletes' race-day diet reports below:

147 LB Female, 60 years old, 16+-hour IMUSA finisher:

I carried two bottles of Cytomax, Metobol and Endurox mixed with bananas and cranberry juice on the bike. At the halfway point on the bike I had two more bottles of the mixture waiting for me. Also I took Gu. I might have had IO on the bike and maybe 20 on the run. I tried to take a gu every mile on the run.

100 LB Female, 60 years old, 15+-hour IM HI finisher:

What I had with me was an energy bar, some pretzel sticks (good), an almond butter and jelly sandwich, and a few bottles of energy drink. On the run I drank water at each stop and had some potato chips. I didn't drink any energy drinks except a few cups of Gatorade at stops. Felt well during and after with this diet. I did carry a gel flask, one on the bike (and probably took one bite if that much of the energy bar), and slurped it maybe once every 2 hours. I also carried one on the run and slurped frequently. I didn't carry an energy bar on the run. Gel and the drink and water were my mainstays

206 LB Male, 42-year-old, 12+-hour IMUSA finisher:

On the bike, power gel every hour, electrolyte pill every hour, one power bar, 132 oz of Sustained Energy (E-Caps formula) drink for calories, etc., a couple of Fig Newtons at bike special needs for a change of pace, water during the entire ride. On the run, two power gels, water, electrolyte pill every three miles (30 minutes), half banana, and half power bar, one pretzel, 24 oz of Sustained Energy during entire run.

130 LB Female, 39-year-old, 11+-hour IMUSA finisher:

On the bike I took in four bottles of Endurox and Cytomax mix ~300 calories each, plus four gels, several bananas, four fig Newtons, water and Gatorade at every station. On the run beginning with ½ bottle of the Endurox mix and then alternating water and Gatorade and water and cola every aid station along with some pretzels every once in a while.

Remember this article just offers some basic guidelines for you to start planning for your race-day nutritional needs, and you will need to experiment with different products to find out what will work best for you. Note that I did not discuss the important pre-race meal, sodium intake and post-race recovery diet. I will save these three important aspects of the ironman race-day diet for another article. Bon appetite!

Contact:

Web site: www.coachbuxton.com
E-mail: Karen@coachbuxton.com